

Learners feedback on feedback: why feedback isn't working.

**Learners' perceptions of feedback from classroom
assessments**

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The core role of feedback

- *‘... feedback is more strongly and consistently related to achievement than any other teaching behaviour...this relationship is consistent regardless of grade, socioeconomic status, race, or school setting’*
(Bellon et al, 1991)
- *‘Providing students engage with feedback, it should enhance learning and improve assessment performance’* (University of Reading, tutor guidance)
- Perceived as essential pedagogical tool in UK national EL setting
- Western academic settings: reviewing is critical part of learning /improving; ‘accepted without question’

Context: feedback in tertiary education in UK

ISSUES

- feedback not considered part of learning in all cultures (Race, 2001)
- feedback from international students on the way feedback is managed in tertiary ed. is not good (e.g. Hammond 2016, satisfaction 60%)
- feedback not formally operationalised, e.g. through training support, standardisation processes, using best tools, etc.
- teachers appear to have negative perceptions, e.g. feedback takes up time, competes with the syllabus, is ineffective
- Kluger and DeNisi (1996) concluded that while feedback, on average, had a significant effect, this masked the fact that over a third of feedback interventions had the negative effect of decreasing performance.

Current research

- Most studies explore how teachers give feedback and/or what teachers should focus on but few consider learner's perspective (e.g. Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Hyland & Hyland, 2006, Yu & Lee 2016).
- Some consider how learners react but not how they perceive the purpose or outcomes of feedback (Lee, 2008 & 2009, 2015).
- Conclusions suggest feedback should be personalised - but no tools for implementation within busy curriculum.
- Eraut (2007) has emphasised the emotional component in feedback, arguing that even when it is task-focused it is still personal and therefore emotional. Because 'any judgement about my (task) is a judgement about me, since my identity is bound up with my performance.'
- David Carless & Boud (2018) – feedback literacy

The problem

- Why does feedback score relatively poorly on satisfaction surveys?
- Why do teachers complain students don't manage feedback properly?
- Why do teachers' informally report that feedback is a 'waste of time'?
- How far are educational and cultural values playing a part?

Pilot study

- RQ1: How do international students' operating in English language (EL) perceive feedback?
- RQ2: How, if at all, do English language (EL) teachers at university support students' understanding of the feedback approach and process?

The study

Focus Group of 6 students: Spanish [LA], Arabic, Vietnamese, Russian, French [Cameroon]

- Do you want feedback? When do you want feedback?
- Do you always understand what to do with feedback?
- What kind of feedback do you like?
- How do you find giving feedback to fellow students?

Focus Group of 4 experienced teachers

- What kind of features do you give feedback on? Why?
- When do you generally give that feedback? Does it vary?
- What are your perceptions about how much difference the feedback you give makes?
- Do you always approach feedback in the same way? Or do you adjust for this student?

Results: learners (1)

Different understandings about content, purpose & timing of feedback

- *'Feedback was only given on things you did wrong, so that next time you would not make the same mistake'.*
- *'every time immediate feedback - to delay will mean you might forget and not learn from it'.*
- *'when I came here it was very new – very important for me, because, all my tutors ... helped me to adapt my culture and helped me be more confident'*

BUT

- *'You don't always know what you want.'*
- *'Sometimes feedback not important, only if you want it, as you have a lot of work.'*
- *'You need to evaluate the feedback to see if it is important to you, as it might be wrong feedback.'*

Results: learners (2)

Different understanding of who should give feedback

- *'I come from Asia, different education system – quite surprised the way tutors gave feedback as quite different – more helpful here in the UK.'*
- *'Very important to get feedback from classmates and teacher – as classmates give useful feedback for example, presentation'*

BUT

- *'Feedback is more important from teacher than from students, because of the level, teacher is important, from the students I learn mistakes.'*
(Colombian student).'
- *'if (peers) are giving feedback, you are giving it with mistakes, I learnt this last term'*
- doesn't have confidence to give feedback, how am I meant to do it.

Results: teachers 1

Culturally sensitive feedback

- *'it has to be individualized, may start by being general, same feedback forms will apply to everyone, but you do realise that certain individuals need a different approach.'*
- *'...certain nationalities find feedback hard to take ...'*
- *'more gentle with Chinese students, listen more, not used to receiving feedback from tutor.'*
- *'I think it depends on cultural or educational background of the students; they don't understand importance of structure and doing things on their own.'*

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Results: teachers 2

Belief that students needed to change

- *'... gave students the choice, didn't want peer feedback, so we gave them teacher feedback.'*
- *'I tried, even written work, but they were [still not] involved.'*
- *'They rush through peer feedback, go off topic, didn't seem to be much discussion between them. Weren't interested, didn't see the point in it, reflected back how they saw their own feedback was interpreted.'*
- *"Students need to learn how to prioritise, as they automatically go straight for the grammar."*

Conclusions

The LEARNERS:

- very disparate; didn't necessarily buy in to western pedagogy e.g. generally saw feedback solely as 'correction' i.e. just wanted score-based or micro-feedback, etc; 'tell me what to do', not keen on peer feedback

The TEACHERS:

- lack of flexibility in considering students' needs and perceptions
- tailored feedback by making assumptions about what and how learners from different cultures received feedback; did not check with or get agreement from learners

Suggestions for improving learners' understanding and use of feedback

- Teachers need to manage and/or exchange expectations with learners
- If feedback is core to learning, it needs to be embedded in the learning process; confidence to focus on feedback (learning) at expense of 'teaching'
- Teachers could be trained in better listening rather than imposing self-informed methodologies on learners
- Institutional support is required through additional training, setting up of frameworks, agreeing standardised approaches across and institution, etc.

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